

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13

ORM-02 DHA-02 ACDA-07 (ISO) W

----- 119800

R 131345Z AUG 76

FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4090

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

CIMCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0638

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ET

SUBJECT: ASMARA ATMOSPHERICS

1. THE WEEK OF AUGUST 9 PASSED QUIETLY IN ASMARA ALTHOUGH THE INSURGENTS MAINTAINED THEIR LOW-KEY ACTIVITIES TO REMIND ETHIOPIANS AND ERITREANS ALIKE OF THEIR CONTINUED EXISTANCE. MAJOR BERHANU, WHO HEADS THE SPECIAL COMMISSION ON ERITREA, IS APPARENTLY INVOLVED IN A DISCREET EXCHANGE OF LETTERS WITH INSURGENTS, BUT IS MAINTAINING SUCH A LOW PROFILE THAT MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE HE HAS RETURNED TO ADDIS. COL. FIKRU IS GOING METHODICALLY FORWARD IN TAKING THE REINS AS CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR, AND ALTHOUGH HE CONSIDERED PERSONALLY AMIABLE, HE GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF A HARD LINE IDEALOGUE.

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2. THE INSURGENTS CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONLY TWO MINOR

INCIDENTS IN ASMARA DURING THE WEEK. ON AUGUST 11 REBELS ABDUCTED TWO YOUNG ERITREAN WOMEN WHO THEY ALLEGED WERE ACTING AS INFORMERS FOR THE EPMG SECURITY FORCES. THEY WERE TAKEN DURING THE DAY AND WERE LEAD OUT OF THE CITY TO CONFINEMENT IN INSURGENT-HELD AREAS. THAT EVENING, REBELS STOLE A TRUCK LOADED WITH BOLTS OF KHAKI MATERIAL PRODUCED IN ASMARA. THE TRUCK WAS IN A GARAGE FOR MINOR REPAIRS PRIOR TO ITS BEING SENT WITH THE CONVOY TO ADDIS. AS IS THE STANDING PRACTICE, THE GARAGE OWNER IS UNDER ARREST FOR SUSPECTED COLLUSION WITH THE HIJACKERS.

3. ON THE PEACE FRONT, DIRG MEMBER MAJOR BERHANU IS REPORTED TO BE QUIETLY ENGAGED IN CORRESPONDENCE WITH INSURGENT LEADERS, WHILE THE COMMITTEE OF ERITREAN ELDERS RETURNED EMPTY-HANDED FROM ASSAB ON AUGUST 11 (SEPTEL). BERHANU, WHOSE MANDATE IS TO DEAL PRIMARILY WITH THE RESETTLEMENT OF ERITREA REFUGEES, IS DESCRIBED AS HAVING REPLACED MAJOR SISAY IN "IMPLEMENTING THE NINE-POINT PEACE DECLARATION". HE IS GOING FORWARD WITH THESE EFFORTS VERY DISCREETLY, SO MUCH SO, IN FACT, THAT FEW PEOPLE REALIZE HE IS STILL IN ASMARA. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MISSION OF LCOL ASRAT DESTA TO KHARTOUM THE FIRST WEEK OF AUGUST AS IT WOULD APPEAR TO INTRUDE INTO THE AREA OF BERHANU'S RESPONSIBILITY. IN ANY EVENT, THE RESETTLEMENT OF ERITREAN REFUGEES, MUCH-TOUTED IN THE ETHIOPIAN PRESS, IS ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY THE RETURN TO TOWNS OF VILLAGERS DISPLACED BY FIGHTING, AND THE SETTLEMENT IN TOWNS OF NOMADS WHO SEEK SAFETY FROM ATTACK BY THE EAF.

4. COL. FIKRU IS HOLDING A SERIES OF FORMAL MEETINGS WITH VARIOUS SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR. HIS PRESENTATIONS ARE REPORTED TO BE HEAVILY LACED WITH THE CURRENT DIRG LINE ON ERITREA AND ON THE MISSION OF SOCIALIST ETHIOPIA. FIKRU IS CONSIDERED TO BE PERSONALLY MUCH MORE AMIABLE AND UNPRETENTIOUS THAN HIS PREDECESSOR GENERAL GETACHEW, BUT HE APPEARS TO LACK GETACHEW'S PRAGMATISM IN DISCUSSING THE ERITREAN SITUATION. IT IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED, HOWEVER, THAT FIKRU WILL SOFTEN SOMEWHAT IF HE SUCCEEDS IN GAINING THE CONFIDENCE AND RESPECT OF HIS SUBORDINATES.

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